



NANSEN
REFUGEE
AWARD

2025 PROGRAMME

UNHCR NANSEN REFUGEE AWARD
CEREMONY

TUESDAY, 16 DECEMBER 2025 • BÂTIMENT DES FORCES MOTRICES • GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

NANSEN HEROES

Humanity in action

Since 1954, the UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award has recognized the extraordinary service of individuals and groups working to protect and assist forcibly displaced and stateless people. Named after Fridtjof Nansen, the first High Commissioner for Refugees, it honors individuals whose empathy, hospitality and action change lives.

This year, we're recognizing a leader who saw a need and chose to act. Chief Martin Azia Sodea of Gado-Badzéré, Cameroon, and his family opened their community when thousands of refugees from the Central African Republic arrived, giving them land to farm and a chance to rebuild their lives.

He sat through over 1,000 disputes, patiently resolving tensions, building trust, turning

strangers into neighbors. Today, his village is thriving. Refugees and locals work side by side. And Chief Martin's example has inspired traditional leaders across the region to do the same, proving that inclusion works when communities take the lead.

While headlines focus on crisis and division, community leaders like Chief Martin are demonstrating that practical solutions exist. We see them working around the world, in Cameroonian villages, Tajik schools, Iraqi women's centers, factory floors in Mexico and on the frontline in Ukraine.

Cover photo: Cover Photo Captions: Martin Azia Sodea, chief of the Gado-Badzéré village, Cameroon is the UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award's 2025 Global Laureate.

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Programme

UNHCR NANSSEN REFUGEE AWARD CEREMONY

Welcome by the Master of Ceremonies	Leanne Manas
Film	<i>Nansen Heroes: Humanity in Action</i>
Opening Remarks	Cate Blanchett
Dance Performance	Ahmad Joudeh
Keynote Speaker	Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees
Celebrating the Regional Winners	Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees
Asia and the Pacific	Negara Nazari
Europe	Proliska
Americas	Pablo Moreno Cadena
Middle East and North Africa	Taban Shoresh
Musical Performance	Tusse
Honouring the Global Laureate	Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees
Film	<i>2025 Global Laureate</i>

PRESENTATION OF THE 2025 UNHCR NANSSEN REFUGEE AWARD

Acceptance speech	Chief Martin Azia Sodea
Musical Performance	Maria Sur
Close of Ceremony	Leanne Manas

A portrait of Chief Martin Azia Sodea, an elderly man with a warm smile, wearing traditional Cameroonian attire. He is wearing a patterned headwrap and a vibrant, geometric-patterned shawl in yellow, orange, and black. A large, dark wooden beaded necklace is draped around his neck. The background is a warm, wooden structure.

2025 Global Laureate

Chief Martin Azia Sodea

Cameroon

Martin Azia Sodea, chief of the Gado-Badzéré village, Cameroon is the UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award's 2025 Global Laureate.

A Chief Who Chose Humanity

“What drove us was the desire
to save lives.”

Chief Martin Azia Sodea, the UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award’s 2025 Global Laureate, has redefined what it means to lead.

Since conflict erupted in the Central African Republic in 2014, his village has become a refuge for thousands fleeing violence. Today, over 36,000 refugees call Gado-Badzéré home, thanks to Chief Sodea’s unwavering commitment to humanity.

Far beyond the traditional role of a village leader, Chief Sodea has embraced the mission of welcoming and integrating refugees. His family allocated land for farming and settlement expansion, transforming the village into a hub of agricultural productivity and self-reliance. Their initiatives have not only fed families but restored dignity and hope.

“For me, it was truly a blessing, something innate. It wasn’t easy, but we had the heart for it,” he says.

He organized young people into a team of volunteers to welcome and guide refugees upon arrival, helping them integrate smoothly and ensuring the harmonious management of vital natural resources like water and forests. His proactive approach has fostered trust and stability in a context where tensions could easily arise.

He leads a joint committee of refugees and Cameroonians, supported by UNHCR and partners, to resolve disputes. Through tireless mediation, he has contributed to the peaceful resolution of over 1,000 disputes, fostering harmony between refugees and host communities. His efforts have built bridges of trust, ensured social stability, and nurtured emotional healing for those scarred by conflict.

Chief Martin also established a women’s group to address urgent needs, including clean water, psychosocial support, and care for the elderly. His personal involvement and advocacy have



LEFT: Martin Azia Sodea, chief of the Gado-Badzéré village, Cameroon is the UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award's 2025 Global Laureate. A former peacekeeper with years of UN missions behind him, he has helped shape a community where refugees and hosts share everything – the same water points, the same hospital, the same schools and markets – a community where everyone belongs.



Seven-year-old Solange Bathe is a pupil in Gado-Badzéré who loves reading. She dreams of becoming a teacher one day and never misses school. In many mixed classrooms, refugee and host community children learn, play and grow together, strengthening social cohesion across the region.

earned him praise from fellow chiefs and municipal authorities. Through his words and actions, he has inspired other leaders to embrace displaced populations.

“They were fleeing war, atrocities, rape, kidnapping, so many things. We couldn't watch our brothers die in such a terrible way. No! We opened our doors. We did it together,” he explains.



Martin Azia Sodea, chief of the Gado-Badzéré village, Cameroon is the UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award's 2025 Global Laureate. A former peacekeeper with years of UN missions behind him, he has helped shape a community where everyone belongs.

Chief Martin's message is simple yet profound: “We are all human beings, and we have to take care of each other.” Through his leadership, he has shown that compassion and vision can transform and build communities where everyone belongs.

2025 Regional Winners

Americas



**Pablo Moreno
Cadena**

Mexico

Middle East and North Africa



Taban Shoresh

Iraq

Europe



Proliska

Ukraine

Asia and the Pacific



Negara Nazari

Tajikistan

Recognizing the extraordinary humanitarian spirit of four regional winners who have dedicated their lives to making a difference in the lives of people forced to flee.

Since 2017, the Selection Committee has also proudly honoured regional winners. This year, each one of these remarkable individuals will receive a certificate of recognition along with financial or material support for their programmes to help sustain and strengthen the work for which they are being recognized.

A man with glasses, wearing a dark jacket over a light blue shirt and khaki pants, is walking down a long, brightly lit aisle in a warehouse. The aisle is flanked by tall stacks of cardboard boxes on both sides. The floor is polished and reflects the overhead lights. The perspective is from behind the man, looking down the aisle towards a bright light at the end.

2025 Regional Winner
Americas

Pablo Moreno Cadena

Mexico

Pablo Moreno Cadena, Senior Executive at MABE, poses at the plant, a Nansen Award winner and advocate for refugee inclusion.

When Business Leads Change

“Any ordinary person can dream of doing something, and that something can contribute strongly to supporting a cause.”

Pablo Moreno Cadena, the UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award's 2025 Regional Winner for the Americas, is a business leader in Mexico who has become a trailblazer for refugee inclusion in the country.

Pablo traces his commitment to refugees back to his childhood. As a boy in Washington DC, he befriended Pedro, a Central American child whose family had fled violence and lost his sister during the journey. That friendship planted a seed. "In each person I meet now, I see Pedro," Pablo says.

A senior executive at MABE, a major appliance manufacturer, Pablo championed a bold initiative: actively hiring and integrating refugees into its workforce. Refugees from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala, many of

them fleeing violence and instability, have found not just jobs, but dignity, security and purpose within MABE. By offering formal employment, the company also ensures that refugees gain access to social protection and opportunities for long-term professional growth, critical lifelines in contexts where they often face legal and economic barriers.

The impact has been transformative and mutual. Refugees have brought determination and entrepreneurial spirit that inspires everyone around them. "We have learned more from them than they from us," Pablo reflects.

What sets Pablo apart is not only the scale of his impact but the depth of his conviction. He consistently champions the idea that refugees are not a burden but an asset, people whose strength and perseverance enrich the communities and companies they join.



A warm embrace between Pablo Moreno and Mary, a refugee from El Salvador.

His leadership has helped shift mindsets across the business community and redefined what it means to be a responsible employer in a time of global displacement. Today, more than 600 companies in Mexico employ refugees, thanks to the combined efforts of dedicated business leaders like Pablo and the steady work of UNHCR's integration teams across the country.

By combining business strategy with empathy, he has helped create a future where refugees are seen, valued and given the chance to thrive. He stands out as a powerful and transformative figure for the region: a private sector leader who demonstrates that refugee inclusion is not only possible but also a driving force for social cohesion and economic growth.

2025 Regional Winner
Middle East and North Africa

Taban Shores

Iraq

Taban Shores, founder of The Lotus Flower and
2025 Nansen Refugee Award winner for the Middle
East and North Africa.

CUNHCR/DAVID ALEXANDER

Turning Trauma into Hope

“The resilience and strength it takes to overcome conflict and displacement gives you the tools to bring so much into the world.”

Taban Shores, the **UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award’s 2025 Regional Winner for the Middle East and North Africa**, is an aid worker, women's rights activist and founder of **The Lotus Flower**, a women-led organization that supports conflict survivors in Iraq.

A Kurdish genocide survivor, Taban was just four years old when she was captured along with her mother and grandparents under Saddam Hussein's regime. Sentenced to be buried alive, she experienced a miraculous last-minute rescue. After fleeing for 12 months through war-torn villages during the Iran-Iraq conflict, she arrived in the UK as a refugee in 1988 at age six, the first time her family was ever safely together.

Decades later, working in London's financial sector, Taban made a life-changing decision. In 2014, as ISIS swept into Iraq, she left her city job and returned to help. On her first day back, she found herself on a helicopter delivering aid to Yazidis trapped on Mount Sinjar, a horrific scene that brought back her own memories. "I couldn't leave behind what I'd seen, so I decided to set up the Lotus Flower," she recalls. Returning to the UK, Taban founded The Lotus Flower in her living room with no money, no connections, but a clear purpose: to support the 2.6 million people displaced in the region. Many of the survivors supported by The Lotus Flower have lost their homes and families and suffered rape, torture, trafficking and slavery.



LEFT: Maysa leads the line of girls sat on their skateboards outside Lotus Flower's community centre in Rwanga IDP camp. The Skating Sisters project in Rwanga IDP camp is a programme started by Lotus Flower in March 2025. Over 60 IDP girls between 7-15 are now part of the project.



Mariam, Nafiya and Hamrin (Left to right) are pictured outside the jam factory. The Jam Sisters project in Domiz refugee camp is a programme started by Lotus Flower two years ago. Nafiya, a Syrian refugee from Qamishli, is now the manager of the jam factory in the camp, and works alongside 5 other refugee women to produce and sell jam to local communities.

Starting out with just two staff members in 2016, The Lotus Flower now employs a team of 150 staff, who have reached 105,000 women and girls. The organisation works at the grassroots level to empower women and girls to fully participate in their communities and drive social and economic change. They run projects in education, sports, skills development and livelihoods, including innovative programmes like a jam factory in a

refugee camp. They also provide mental health support and advocate against gender-based violence and sexual abuse.

The Lotus Flower is locally rooted and globally connected, striving for a world where women and girls are free from violence and can heal, learn and grow.

2025 Regional Winner
Europe



Proliska

Ukraine

Andrii Surzhan, field worker, Proliska office in Dnipro,
and Alyona Sinaeva Psychologist, and other staff during
an all staff meeting at Proliska office in Dnipro.

No One Left Behind

“This award is not just for Proliska. This is an award for all Ukrainians who help, who volunteer, who don't stand aside.”

Proliska, the UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award's 2025 Regional Winner for Europe, is a Ukrainian organization providing life-saving aid to more than 3.2 million people, often in the most dangerous and isolated areas.

In the aftermath of air strikes and shelling, Proliska is often among the first to respond through their dedicated staff. When attacks happen at night or in remote areas, Proliska deploys teams outside regular hours to ensure no one is left behind. They are one of the few humanitarian actors authorized to operate alongside municipal emergency responders during active emergencies. Proliska has become a trusted and essential presence in Ukraine's most dangerous zones.

Their work is driven by a simple moral question: "Who are we, if we leave them? Who are we if we abandon them?" In villages where only 30 elderly residents remain, people who refuse to leave their land, their relatives' graves, their homes, Proliska's mobile teams of volunteers continue to deliver food, water, medical care, construction materials, and psychosocial support. "We're not superheroes," their team says. "We're ordinary people who simply cannot stand aside when people need help." Their rapid deployment and protection-first approach ensures that the most vulnerable, including older people, people with disabilities, and families with few resources, are never forgotten, even on the front lines.

2025 Regional Winner
Asia and the Pacific

Today a reader tomorrow a leader

Negara Nazari
Tajikistan

Negara Nazari, 2025 Regional winner Asia and the Pacific, with her students at the Ariana Learning Center

Educating Women, Educating Society

“Refugees flee their homes for education.
So it's very important to our life.”

Negara Nazari, the UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award's 2025 Regional Winner for Asia-Pacific, is an Afghan refugee and co-founder of the Ariana Learning Centre in Tajikistan.

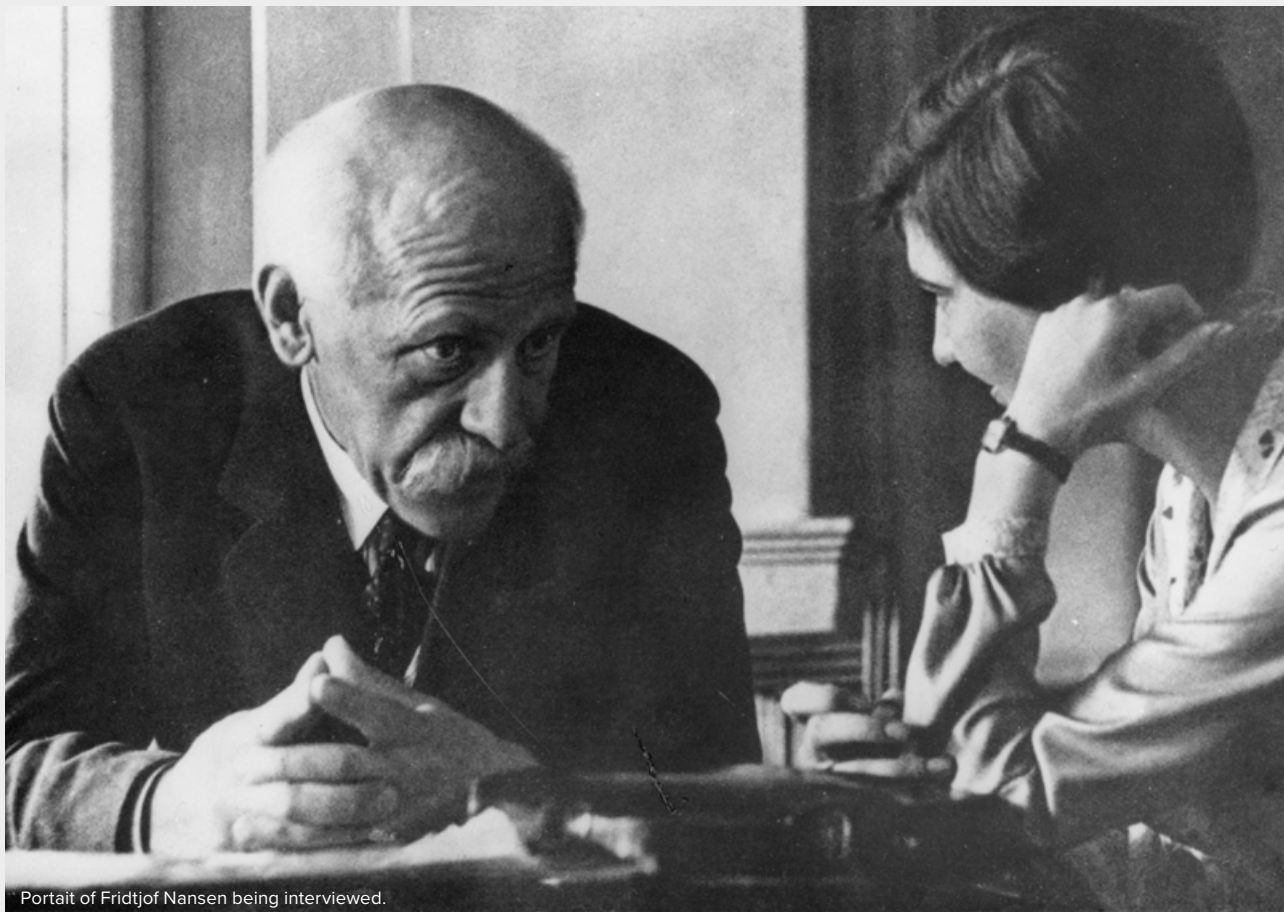
A former DAFI scholar with a degree in economics, Negara chose a path rooted in compassion and action. Instead of pursuing a corporate career, she decided to build a school for young Afghan refugees who were unable to access education. Ariana Learning Center (ALC) was launched in 2020 with just two classrooms, two teachers, a handful of students and so few chairs that two students had to share one seat. With no funding, Negara and her husband built the centre from nothing, driven by her belief that "if you educate a woman, you educate a society." Today, with its pay-what-you-can model, ALC today serves

over 1,200 young learners, filling an urgent need for quality, affordable education for Afghan refugee and Tajik children.

They offer classes in languages, technology, mathematics, computer science and the arts, as well as psychological counselling and leadership programmes.

They have opened two satellite branches, including a kindergarten attended by 220 children, and provide specialized leadership and management training for Afghan women refugees.

ALC is more than a school; it is a safe haven where Afghan refugees and Tajik children learn side by side, celebrating Nowruz and Shabbi Yalda together, a place of learning, healing, and a powerful symbol of hope for an entire community.



© UNHCR / 1934

Portrait of Fridtjof Nansen being interviewed.

Continuing the Nansen Legacy

In 1922, the Norwegian humanitarian, scientist, explorer, and diplomat Fridtjof Nansen, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his extraordinary efforts in repatriating prisoners of war, leading international relief work, and serving as the League of Nations' High Commissioner for Refugees. This recognition captured the essence of a life devoted to bold action and unwavering compassion, a legacy that endured until his passing in 1930.

Yet Nansen's path could have been very different. His first calling as a scientist led him to groundbreaking discoveries about the nervous system, including pioneering the theory of neurons. But his thirst for adventure and deep love for his homeland drew him from the laboratory to the icy frontiers of polar exploration, earning him fame and fortune.

“Nothing great and good can be furthered
in the world without cooperation.”

Fridtjof Nansen

Diplomacy became his greatest mission. As Norway's ambassador to Britain and later a global advocate for peace, Nansen's integrity and courage opened doors that others could not. He became a trusted voice in a fractured world, proving that honesty and vision can transcend borders.

Today, Nansen's spirit lives on, in countless Nansen award heroes who fight tirelessly to protect and restore dignity for refugees, internally displaced and stateless people. Their

work, often against overwhelming odds, offers hope, practical solutions, and the chance for millions to rebuild their lives far from home. They embody Nansen's ideals: selflessness, determination, and a belief that humanity can rise above adversity.

Nansen was an idealist who embraced pragmatic solutions. His vision, vigor, and compassion continue to inspire those honored with “the Nansen”—a testament to the enduring power of cooperation and courage.

Past Winners

Where Are They Now?

Since its creation, the Nansen Refugee Award has honoured more than 60 people and organisations whose extraordinary dedication has improved the lives of refugees, displaced and stateless people.

Beyond recognition, the programme continues to shine a light on acts of compassion and welcome and provides financial support that helps laureates strengthen their work and expand their impact.

Here are a few past laureates and how the Nansen Award helped them build on their achievements:

Jin Dawod

Regional Winner for Europe, 2024



“The Nansen Award transformed us from a small initiative into a global movement for healing – proving that peace begins with mental health.”

Jin Dawod, a Syrian Psychologist and founder of Peace Therapist, received the Nansen Refugee Award for Europe in 2024 for pioneering digital mental health support for refugees and displaced communities. A refugee herself, Jin created the first refugee-led platform providing multilingual therapy

and psychosocial care across the Middle East and Europe.

The Award gave Peace Therapist a global platform, opening doors to new partnerships, speaking invitations, and recognition for refugee-led innovation. In the months that followed, Jin addressed audiences at the UN General Assembly, Geneva Peace Week, and Peace Therapist was later named the 2025 UN SDG Action Award Changemaker. New collaborations, such as with the Şanlıurfa Bar Association in Türkiye, are now improving access to mental health care for thousands of refugees and professionals.

Since receiving the award, Peace Therapist has grown from reaching 50,000 to over 70,000 people in 26 countries. The team has provided thousands of therapy sessions, including support for survivors of the Türkiye–Syria earthquake, and launched a WhatsApp hotline for elderly people and low-connectivity users. Following the award, demand for affordable mental health services surged among low-income and refugee populations. Recognizing their inability to afford paid therapy, Jin collaborated with partners to increase the availability of free therapy sessions.

Dr. Akio Kanai

Global Laureate, 2006



Dr. Akio Kanai conducts an eye examination during one of Fuji Optical's field missions to Azerbaijan.

Dr. Akio Kanai, founder of Fuji Optical Co. Ltd., received the 2006 Nansen Refugee Award for his lifelong commitment to restoring sight and dignity to refugees and displaced people worldwide.

Once displaced himself, Dr. Kanai turned his personal experience into four decades of humanitarian work, partnering with UNHCR since 1984 to provide eyeglasses and eye care to displaced communities from Thailand to Nepal, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. In addition, eyeglasses were donated in kind to five other countries: Iraq, Bangladesh, Tanzania, Kenya, and Ukraine.

Following his award, Dr. Kanai used the prize funds to support housing construction for refugees in Armenia and drill wells for displaced communities in Azerbaijan. These wells that still provide safe drinking water today. Since 1983, Fuji Optical's optometrists have conducted 39 field visits, screening over 68,000 people and donating nearly 192,000 pairs of glasses, with the Nansen Award bringing increased public awareness in Japan and new partnerships that continue to sustain the Fuji Vision Aid Mission's global reach.

Dr. Evan Atar

Global Laureate, 2018



Dr Atar in Maban hospital, the only functional surgical facility in all of Upper Nile, South Sudan

© UNHCR/WILL SWANSON

South Sudanese surgeon Dr. Evan Atar Adaha received the 2018 Nansen Award after dedicating more than two decades to providing life-saving care for refugees and local communities affected by conflict in Sudan and South Sudan. He ran the only functional hospital in the region from his base in Bunj, South Sudan, serving over 200,000 people.

Following his award, Dr. Atar used the prize funds to expand maternal and neonatal services at Maban Hospital, building a new

maternity ward and neonatal unit, equipping operating tables and stretchers, and increasing surgical capacity. In 2023 alone, the hospital performed 600 caesarean sections without a single maternal death, in addition to more than 1,000 major surgeries. After navigating management and funding challenges at Maban Hospital, Dr. Atar remains deeply committed to serving displaced communities and is establishing a new, locally led organization to ensure the continuation of maternal and surgical healthcare for refugees and vulnerable people in Upper Nile.

Doña Vicenta

Regional Winner for the Americas, 2022



© UNHCR/NICO FILIPPOROSSO

Doña Vicenta González at the AMECUP workshop where refugees and local women produce organic cocoa and food products



© UNHCR/NICO FILIPPOROSSO

Doña Vicenta González received the 2022 Nansen Refugee Award Regional Winner for the Americas for her decades of work empowering refugee and local women in northern Costa Rica to earn a living through organic cocoa and agriculture.

After returning from the award ceremony, Doña Vicenta used the prize money to complete the construction of the chocolate production facility, ensuring full compliance with institutional and health regulations. The award brought national attention that sparked new partnerships to help complete the project. They expanded their product line which attracted new customers and contributed to long-term sustainability and autonomy. By expanding and reorganizing its workspace, AMECUP can now involve more women in cacao harvesting, collaborate with additional local growers, and maintain fully organic production.

Maimouna Ba

Regional Winner for Africa, 2024

Maimouna Ba, a peace activist and founder of the Maman Sahélienne Foundation in Burkina Faso, received the 2024 Nansen Award for her dedication to supporting displaced women and children in the Sahel.

Born in Dori, Maimouna has worked since the outbreak of conflict in 2016 to address the urgent needs of those affected by violence, founding an organization with other young women to tackle critical issues including education, economic empowerment, gender-based violence, and peacebuilding in one of the world's fastest-growing displacement crises. Following her award, the Foundation was able to expand field programmes to new areas across Burkina Faso and elevated Maimouna's voice from local communities to the global stage, including speaking at the UN General Assembly. She used the prize funds to launch "Dagnal for Peace," an initiative establishing a cooperative with internally displaced women to support their economic recovery through cosmetics, fashion, and agribusiness.

The award's credibility also empowered the Foundation to expand its youth-focused mission: keeping small grassroots organizations afloat, bringing together youth peace initiatives, and advocating to secure resources for young people in the Sahel. Today, Maimouna returns to the 2025 Nansen Award ceremony as a member of the Nansen Award Selection Committee.



©UNHCR/ETINOSA YVONNE

Maimouna Ba at the UNHCR country office in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

Featured Voices (in order of appearance)



Leanne Manas, UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador

Leanne Manas Goodwill Ambassador

Master of Ceremonies

Leanne Manas was appointed as a Goodwill Ambassador for UNHCR in 2019. Since then, she has travelled with UNHCR to Kenya, Mozambique, Malawi and Lebanon, using her platform to advocate for the protection, dignity, and empowerment of refugees around the world. A multiple award-winning senior news anchor, Leanne is one of South Africa's most respected media figures. For over two decades, she has anchored the South African Broadcasting Corporation's (SABC) flagship morning news programme, Morning Live, which reaches millions of viewers across Africa and beyond. In recognition of her outstanding contribution to journalism and humanitarian work, Leanne was awarded the honour of Knight of the French National Order of Merit. Beyond television, she is also an accomplished radio host, keynote speaker, and MC, admired for her professionalism, warmth and ability to connect with audiences across diverse platforms.



UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador Cate Blanchett visits refugees in a community centre in Zaatari refugee camp, Jordan.

Cate Blanchett Goodwill Ambassador

Opening Remarks

Cate Blanchett was announced as a Goodwill Ambassador for UNHCR in 2016. Since then, she has become one of UNHCR's most dedicated advocates, supporting the organisation through high-level advocacy, fundraising and campaigns.

Cate has met with refugees in countries across the globe including Egypt, Brazil, South Sudan, Niger, Jordan, Bangladesh and Lebanon, helping to amplify refugee voices and working to ensure the human stories behind the figures are heard. Beyond her visits, she has addressed the European Parliament and US Congress, calling for continued support for refugees. She's an Academy Award-winner and a humanitarian, and continues to use her platform to promote understanding, inclusion and solidarity with people forced to flee.



Ahmad Joudeh, UNHCR High Profile Supporter and dancer.

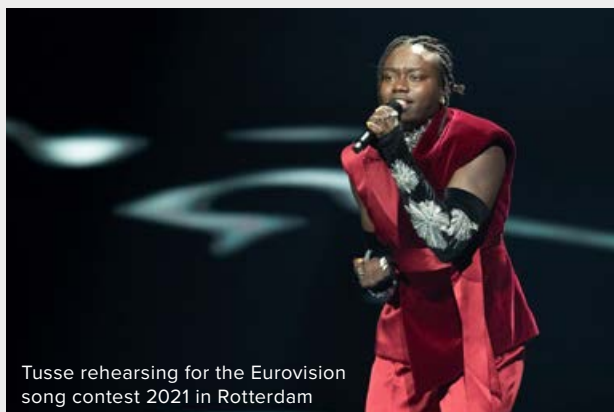
Ahmad Joudeh

High Profile Supporter

Dance Performance

Ahmad Joudeh is a dancer and choreographer born in Damascus in 1990 as a stateless refugee and was raised in Yarmouk, a Palestinian refugee camp. From a young age, he pursued his passion for dance despite strong opposition from his community. During the Syrian civil war, he lost his home and five family members, yet he continued to pursue dance as a symbol of hope and resistance.

After his story aired on Dutch television in 2016, the Dutch National Ballet invited him to the Netherlands through The Dance for Peace Fund. He later settled in Amsterdam and became a Dutch citizen in 2021. His story inspired the Emmy Award-winning documentary and memoir *Dance or Die*. He's a member of the Golden State Ballet company in San Diego and was awarded the Fair Saturday Award at the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao in October 2025.



Tusse rehearsing for the Eurovision song contest 2021 in Rotterdam

Tusse

Ambassador For Sweden For UNHCR

Musical Performance

Tousin “Tusse” Chiza is a musician and singer who was born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Tusse fled to neighbouring Uganda at age five together with his aunt. After spending three years in a refugee camp in Uganda, he was resettled to Sweden. In 2021, Tusse represented Sweden at the Grand Final of the Eurovision Song Contest with the powerful song “Voices”. Tusse openly shares his experience in overcoming challenges of settling in and adapting to new situations, helping empower young people facing similar difficulties. He has been an Ambassador for Sweden for UNHCR since 2021.



Maria Sur, Ukrainian singer, performer and Ambassador for Sweden for UNHCR.

Maria Sur

Ambassador For Sweden For UNHCR

Musical Performance

Maria Sur is a 20-year-old Ukrainian singer and performer who fled her hometown of Zaporizhzhia in 2022 following the Russian invasion. Before the war, she took part in Holos Krainy, the Ukrainian version of The Voice, but her career in Ukraine was cut short when she and her mother were forced to flee in search of safety. Now based in Sweden, Maria has continued her musical journey, performing in the Swedish qualifications for the Eurovision Song Contest. As an ambassador for Sweden for UNHCR, she draws on her personal experience of displacement to raise awareness and empathy for refugees around the world.

MADE51

MADE51 is UNHCR's flagship livelihoods initiative and global brand that connects refugee artisans with local social enterprises and other partners to design, make and market home décor and accessories worldwide. As the world's first ecosystem creating a viable route to market for refugee-made products, MADE51 enables refugees to earn an income using their craftsmanship and heritage.

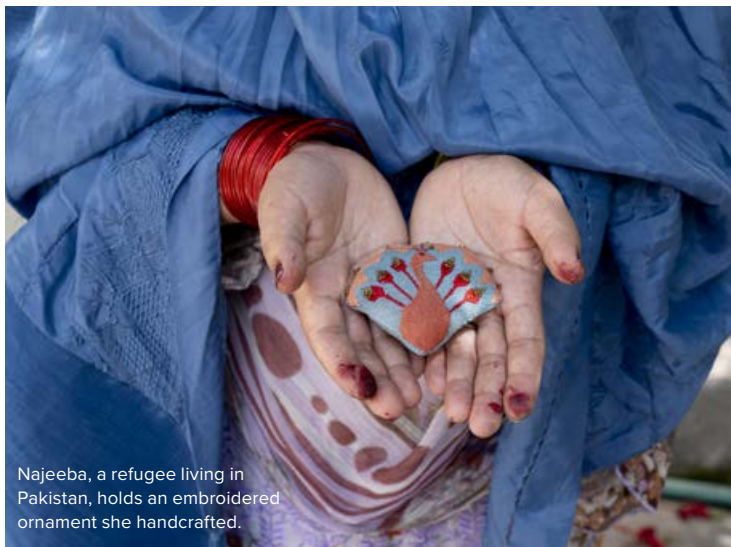
MADE51 now works with 38 social enterprises in 23 countries, supported by a wider network that includes the World Fair Trade Organization and private-sector partners who share their expertise to help include refugees in the creative economy. We invite you to explore and shop the display at tonight's reception and consider how your company could support through sourcing or by offering relevant expertise.

This year, Sudanese refugee artisans created the handcrafted elements of the Peace Tree on display this evening. Decorated with pieces that reflect the skills of Sudanese artisans across East and North Africa, the tree carries their calls for peace on its branches. We invite you to visit the Peace Tree and add your own wish for peace in Sudan. Each message becomes another leaf, linking your voice with theirs and strengthening a shared, urgent call for peace and the need to keep all eyes on Sudan.



© UNHCR / HOUSAM HARIRI

Syrian refugee artisans stitching and crafting MADE51 products at one of the artisan's balcony.



Najeeba, a refugee living in Pakistan, holds an embroidered ornament she handcrafted.

© UNHCR/NIDA MEHBOOB



An artisan shows her craftwork as part of a MADE51 initiative in Rwanda

© UNHCR/JACQUES NKINZINGABO

Cuisine Lab

Refugee Chefs

Cuisine Lab is a Geneva-based social enterprise whose team of passionate refugee chefs offer catering and event services and operate a restaurant. Its staff includes hospitality industry professionals who provide training to help under-employed refugees achieve economic independence. Cuisine Lab's programmes are designed to empower asylum seekers and refugees through opportunities to develop their skills, gain valuable experience, and secure meaningful employment to foster their social integration into their new community.



© UNHCR/USAN HOPPER



Chefs from social enterprise Cuisine Lab, serve food at an event to mark World Refugee Day at UNHCR headquarters in Geneva Switzerland.



©UNHCR/SUSAN HOPPER

Chef Ghayathri

Ghayathri brings the vibrant flavors and spices of Sri Lanka to the table. Her culinary journey is rooted in coconut and the aromas of Ceylon cinnamon. Known for her signature carrot cake infused with secret spices, considered the best in town, she now proudly holds an AFP Culinary Diploma with Cuisine Lab.

Help us find the next hero

The UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award recognizes extraordinary individuals or groups whose work transforms the lives of refugees, internally displaced or stateless people.

The monetary prize, generously donated by the governments of Switzerland and Norway, enables recipients of the award to continue their life-saving work.

How can you nominate?

Nominations for the 2026 UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award open in early 2026.

Visit **unhcr.org/nansen** for details

Anyone can submit a nomination.

We are looking for people, groups, and organizations who have gone above and beyond the call of duty and taken extraordinary action to deliver protection, assistance, and solutions for forcibly displaced or stateless people.





Norwegian Ministry
of Foreign Affairs

“Humanitarian response represents a lifeline for millions displaced across the world, and we deeply value the sacrifice and extraordinary contribution of those on the forefront. Norway is proud to join the UN in honoring the world’s oldest and most distinguished humanitarian award, celebrating those who protect and support people forced to flee. This year’s laureates embody the courage, dedication, and solidarity that defined Fridtjof Nansen’s humanitarian vision.”

Ambassador Tormod C. Endresen

**Permanent Representative of Norway
to the UN in Geneva**



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

“At a time when the big picture is worsening, and when things seem to be going wrong, it is even more important to get inspiration and motivation from local leaders. They show us all the way. Because they have the will, because they do what is possible and because they go beyond the limits others take for granted. This is why Switzerland is proud to support the Nansen Award and its unsung heroes!”

Ambassador Jürg Lauber

**Permanent Representative of Switzerland
to the UN in Geneva**



REPUBLIQUE
ET CANTON
DE GENEVE

POST TENEBRAS LUX

“Protecting the dignity of those forced to flee is not only a humanitarian responsibility - it is a cornerstone of our shared humanity. In this era of unprecedented displacement, Geneva stands as a beacon of hope and solidarity. We are proud to honour the extraordinary individuals who refuse to accept despair as inevitable, who turn compassion into action, and who help restore dignity one life at a time. Their courage reminds us that our response to the plight of refugees ultimately reflects who we are as a global community. Solidarity is not merely a choice - it is our moral imperative.”

Natalie Fontanet

**State Councillor of the Republic
and Canton of Geneva**



IKEA Foundation

“We are humbled by the leadership of this year’s Nansen Award honourees, who show what is possible through compassion and practical action for people forced to flee. Their courage speaks powerfully to our shared humanity. We are deeply grateful to everyone working with dedication and care to support communities rebuilding their lives.”

Jessica Anderen

CEO of IKEA Foundation







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